

# Notes on Pottery Manufacture near Raba, East Sumbawa

*Received 22 March 1973*

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ON 4 December 1972, during a four-hour visit to Bima in East Sumbawa, I saw some pottery being sold by the local people in the market. I questioned a friend whether the pottery was made by the local people in Bima or had been brought from somewhere in central Sumbawa. He explained that the village Raba-ngodu is the center of pottery manufacture in East Sumbawa. Raba is the name of a small town (see Fig. 1) about 4 km to the southeast of Bima, and the word *ngodu* means "pottery-making." Raba-ngodu is thus the name of a small village lying within easy reach at the southern end of Raba.

The main purpose of my short visit to Bima was to investigate the collection of the retired Sultan, which is now kept by the local government in Bima. It consists of some beautiful krisses, lances, javelins, flags and a Portuguese drum. The drum is made of bronze and stands about 45 cm high. The lower part is inscribed with the words "Pro patria et occ (eoc?) Indorien." Presumably occ (eoc?) is an abbreviation of *occidentalis*.

Unfortunately, the visit to Raba-ngodu could only be for half an hour. Consequently the following article is only a preliminary note on pottery manufacture in this village. I hope I shall be able to return to this matter one day.

At present the inhabitants of Raba-ngodu are Muslims. Numerous houses on either side of the road belonged to potters and several of them were working at their trade. I watched and asked questions about pottery manufacture of one female potter who was busy with the paddling of some pottery in the *wombo*. It must be understood that the houses (*uma*; in Indonesian *rumah*) at Raba-ngodu are built on high pilings (Pl. I), and the small room under the house where pottery is manufactured is called the *wombo*. Actually, this *wombo* is the workshop for potters. The clay (*dana lili*; in Indonesian *tanah liat*) is gathered by women, sometimes helped by the men, from many fields in the village. The manufacture is done only by women, but the baking by men (*moné*; in Balinese *muani*, Old Balinese *maruhani*)

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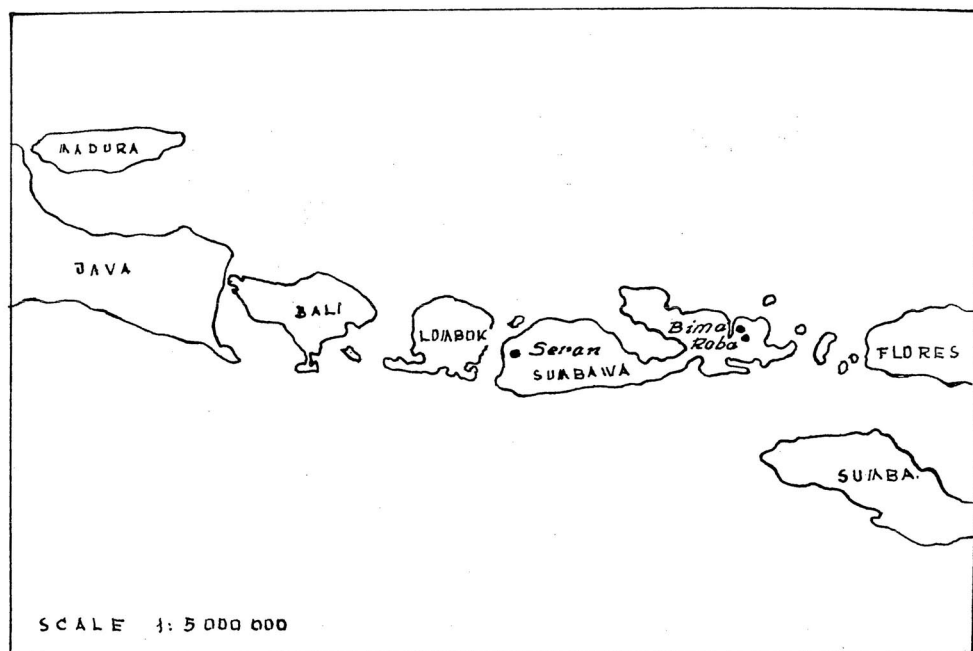


Fig. 1 Locations of Bima, Raba, and Seran in Sumbawa.

and women (*siwé*). (The root *wi* (*bi*) means "female." *Wini* ("wife") in Old Malay. Cf. *wahine* in Polynesia.)

There are several types of vessels, pots, and bowls made by the potters here. The most popular type is a globular, narrow-mouthed waterpot called *roancuu* (pronounced *roa-ncu'u*, with *c* as in chopper). In Modern Bimanese (*nggahi mBojo*) the word *roa* means "pottery," and *ncuu* "to carry on the head." This waterpot is borne on the head by young girls or old women, and is used to bring water from a village spring or from a private well. According to my informant, a *roancuu* can be divided into several parts (Fig. 2): the mouth (*asa*), lip (*wiwi*; in Indonesian *bibir*), neck (*wo'o*); stomach (*loko*) or hip (*kompé*, *kadalé*), and the bottom (*loki*) or buttock (*ponto*; in Indonesian *pantat*).

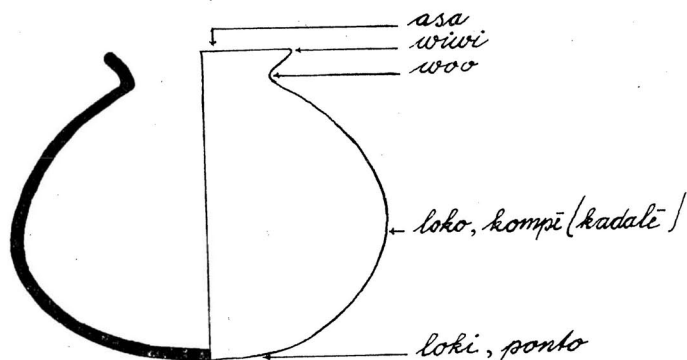


Fig. 2 Parts of a *roancuu* (a waterpot).

After the pot has reached approximately the right size and shape it is placed to dry for one to two days in the shade under the house. The potter gives the somewhat hardened pot a final rounding and finishing with a flat wooden paddle (*bébé*) and the stone anvil (*wadu moré*; in Indonesian *batu bulat*, "a round stone"). Plate II shows some plain and carved wooden paddles used by the potters at Raba-ngodu. It is worth mentioning that a certain pattern of these wooden paddles shows a similarity to that found on the body of a bronze kettledrum which I recently discovered at Seran in West Sumbawa (Fig. 3). This drum, which has a height of 39.7 cm and a tympanon diameter of 51 cm, belongs to the well-known Heger-I type (Pl. III). It was made during the period of about A.D. 300 to 600. A similar type is mentioned by H. R. van Heekeren (1958: Pl. IV). He calls the pattern "ladder design" (1958: 98).

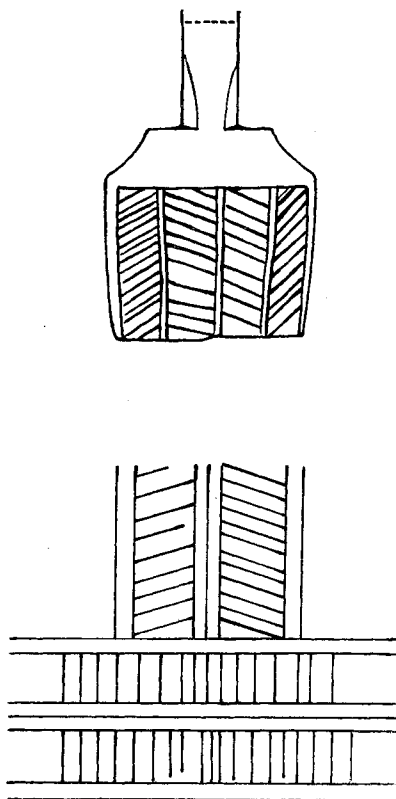


Fig. 3 Pattern on a wooden paddle similar to pattern found on the body of a kettledrum.

In general there are two kinds of patterns at Raba-ngodu. The first, an impressed pattern called *rédié*, is produced by beating the clay wall of a pot with a *bébé* (a wooden paddle). (A wooden paddle is called *penoplekan* or *pemangkalan* in Bali.) In addition, the potters also used the dry skin (*huri manga*; in Indonesian *kulit kering*) of a buffalo to produce another impressed pattern (Fig. 4). The second type of pattern is a protruding design called *péta* produced by a woman with her right fingers while the pot turns slowly on her lap (Pl. IV). The woman dips her fingers

into water from time to time and with it wets the clay. The most common pattern of a *péta* is a triangle, usually called the *tumpal* motif in Indonesia (Pl. V). But the potters at Raba-ngodu do not know the name of this motif or those of the other patterns. They know only the above-mentioned impressed (*rédi*) and protruding designs (*péta*). When the potters were questioned as to whether those patterns have a special meaning, they explained that *rédi* and *péta* are produced to facilitate transport or to prevent the waterpots from having a slippery surface.

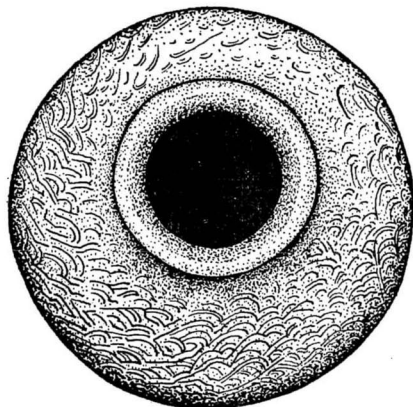


Fig. 4 *Roancuu* impressed with a *huri manga* (dry skin).

By way of summary, the so-called paddle-and-anvil technique is still practiced by potters in East Sumbawa. Special mention must also be made that the name of the wooden paddle, *bébé*, is closely related to the *peppè* used by the Ibanags in the Philippines (Solheim 1954). Also, the words *wadu* ("a stone") and *dana lili* ("a clay") are nearly the same as *batu* and *dali* in the Ibanag language (Solheim 1954). Obviously these people are speakers of a Malayo-Polynesian language (Solheim 1964: 384).

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